United Nations S/2003/1165

Security Council

Distr.: General
10 December 2003
English
Original: French

Letter dated 3 December 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the speech to the nation delivered by H.E. Mr. Laurent Gbagbo, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, concerning recent developments in the Ivorian crisis (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have this letter and its annex issued as an official document of the Security Council under the item entitled "Situation in Côte d'Ivoire".

(*Signed*) Philippe D. **Djangone-Bi**
Ambassador
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Annex to the letter dated 3 December 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Speech to the Nation by President Laurent Gbagbo

Men and women of Côte d'Ivoire, my dear compatriots,

Since the war broke out I have been listening to you, especially in the last few weeks when you have been coming from every region of the country to comfort me with your fraternal visits. I have listened to you. I have understood you. You have all asked me to preserve the institutions of the Republic and our collective dignity while, at the same time, keeping alive all chances for peace.

Such is the symbolic value of the various articles you have given me. This evening I should like to pay tribute to this mobilization of provincial Côte d'Ivoire and to your noble spirit.

Dear compatriots,

The war is not yet over. Our country remains divided and the rebels are still in arms. However, since 4 July 2003, when there was a solemn and moving ceremony, the arms have fallen silent. I am happy that they continue to remain silent. They will be silent forever and Côte d'Ivoire will soon be whole again. That is your wish, that is the wish of us all. That has been the purpose of my battle, ever since this fratricidal conflict, as vain as it has been devastating, began.

This evening, I should like to invite each and every one of you to look within himself/herself and to ponder on the state in which our country finds itself. We have no right, in the eyes of history, to let this situation of uncertainty, where there is neither war nor peace, continue. We must go forward towards peace without delay, without calculation and trusting in one another.

It is a message of unity and of hope that I bring you here this evening. I am calling on the entire nation to mobilize and to make the last efforts needed so that the country may return to the path of unity and of prosperity.

During the night of 18/19 September 2002, we all discovered, to our dismay, that war was possible in Côte d'Ivoire. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that the primary cause of this war is rejection of democracy.

Democracy means that whoever wins the elections gets to govern the country and to implement his programme while respecting the opinions and the expectations of the opposition. Democracy also means respect for democratic institutions and the people who embody these institutions. I should like to repeat, this evening, that I am committed to democracy.

In opting for the democratic way in Côte d'Ivoire, we did not bow to what was fashionable; while still in the opposition, we were calling for a peaceful transition, in 1983, in order to get away from the one-party system. Côte d'Ivoire is destined to be a democracy and whoever seeks to divert it from the road to democracy brings ruin on the State and misfortune to society, a society that is multi-ethnic and made up of people with different and varied cultures.

Nature and history have decided that it will be so. We have no single ethnic group that is large, demographically, to impose its will by sheer weight of numbers. Accordingly, we are forced into solidarity and cooperation to implement any nationwide plan.

It is because they failed to understand the democratic issues of our history that some people tried to tip our nation into chaos. But the people of Côte d'Ivoire as a whole — the army, the women, the young people, the political leaders, the President of the Republic — have shown the entire world that, although sorely bruised and tried, this country remains strong.

I am not forgetting the role that young people have played in the transformation that we have been undergoing since 1990. Women and young people have been the segments of society that have been hardest hit by the crisis whose manifestations began to make themselves felt back in 1980.

I also realize that the deeper Côte d'Ivoire sank into the crisis, the more the funds needed to provide training for young people and women were drying up. For example, whereas the population has been increasing steadily at an annual rate of 3.8 per cent, funds for education and health have remained stagnant at 0.5 per cent.

This is why finding a solution to the present crisis means taking strong measures so that women and young people do not feel that they have been abandoned, so that they do not remain by the wayside. With this in mind, by the end of 2003 and in accordance with the promises that I made to young people during the electoral campaign of 2000, I will announce strong measures to create jobs. This will give our young people prospects and will turn them away from arms.

My dear compatriots,

During these difficult times, we have never been alone. From the start of the crisis the international community has been by our side. ECOWAS, France, the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, the international financial institutions did not abandon us to our fate. They condemned the rebellion and immediately offered to mediate in the negotiations in which we decided to engage.

But the road to peace is never an easy one. We went to Accra, then to Lomé, to Dakar, then to Bamako. The political parties found themselves, at the invitation of France, in Linas-Marcoussis where they signed agreements; these were endorsed by the United Nations at the conference held at avenue Kléber in Paris.

Whatever one may criticize about the Linas-Marcoussis Agreements, they have at least the merit of reaffirming four fundamental principles, which are their raison d'être: the need to preserve the territorial integrity of the country; respect for the institutions of the Republic; restoration of the authority of the State; accession to and exercise of power through democratic means. We all know the main points on which these Agreements are founded: appointment of a consensus Prime Minister, formation of a government of national reconciliation, disarmament, reunification of the country, voting on an amnesty law, landowners' code, nationality code, eligibility, human rights, economic recovery and need to preserve social cohesion.

As soon as the avenue Kléber Conference was over, on 25 January 2003, I appointed a consensus Prime Minister to whom, in accordance with article 53 of our Constitution, I delegated the powers needed in order for the Government of the Republic to be able to operate and work for the restoration of peace.

I formed a balanced government of national reconciliation composed of ministers from the political parties that signed the Marcoussis Agreements, rebel movements and civil society. This government is now complete for the ministers of defence, internal security and the family were appointed in September 2003.

The nation has pardoned the rebels despite the serious acts they committed. On 6 August 2003, our Parliament voted a generous amnesty law in their favour which does not, however, go as far as giving impunity. I immediately promulgated that law and the acting Minister of Defence issued an order reintegrating military deserters into the army. I am asking the rebels to take the hand that the nation as a whole has extended to them.

This very day, Thursday, 27 November 2003, we began to discuss in the Council of Ministers the laws suggested in the Marcoussis Agreement. They comprise a series of texts covering all the issues opened by the Ivorian crisis — free movement of persons, right of residence and of establishment in the ECOWAS countries.

- Ivorian nationality code
- Article 55 of the Constitution
- Identification of the population of Côte d'Ivoire
- Ivorian national identity card
- Rural land
- Illicit enrichment
- Other

My dear compatriots,

Today disarmament has priority. Disarmament means liberating the occupied areas, redeploying the administration, resuming economic, social, political and cultural life throughout the territory. Disarmament puts an end to belligerence and paves the way for peace.

That is why I urge the whole nation to mobilize itself so that we can get through this stage in serenity. "Children know how to climb up, but they do not know how to get down again." That is the very wise message that the people of Daloa gave me the other day, when them came to visit me in the Presidential Palace. That message is intended for the entire Ivorian nation. We must help our brothers, our children who have taken up arms against the mother country, put an end to human suffering in the besieged areas, so as to free Côte d'Ivoire from this nightmare.

I have already said this. Today the rebellion has reached a deadlock, as has the international community in the face of the Ivorian crisis. But this deadlock is also a deadlock that faces Côte d'Ivoire as a whole. Our country is still waiting for peace.

Our defence and security forces have valiantly defended their country. It is our duty to build peace. We must pay tribute to our soldiers who have paid a heavy price for war.

The official funeral ceremony held at the police school on 15 November demonstrated the extent of the sacrifices made to defend the nation.

We salute our defence and security forces. We salute our martyrs. In their memory and for the glory of our defence and security forces, we will create an avenue of the armed forces and a boulevard 18 and 19 September 2002.

We were shaken up on 18 and 19 September 2002. We must no longer be shaken up. Now we must start to reflect on in-depth reform of our defence and security tools. That is why I have asked the minister of defence to revise the draft law on military programming so as to give our defence and security forces a face, operational capacities and new and greater resources.

But, as I said in my letter to the armed forces on the first anniversary of the outbreak of war, a war is always won with allies. We therefore need all our friends in order to take the last few steps that still separate us from Peace.

I should therefore like once again to thank all the States and all the international organizations for all that they have done and continue to do to help us resolve the crisis. I urge them to stay with us during these last few moments, the coming moments which will be decisive for peace.

I should like, in particular, to remind France of what I said to General Bentégeat, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, when he visited Abidjan. "The time for recrimination is past. Now we must open the pages of a new solidarity, that is to say, a new cooperation."

In the name of all of you, I should like, this evening, to solemnly thank France for all it has done so far and for what it continues to do.

France has gone so far as to shed its blood for peace in our country. Two French soldiers died for Côte d'Ivoire. We owe respect to their memory and gratitude to the French authorities. May they receive here, in the name of the Ivorian people, the homage of the entire nation. They are in our hearts the symbol of a renewed alliance between our two sister countries, whom fate has bound by so many years of shared history.

Their sacrifice will not be in vain. Their sacrifice must not be in vain. I am counting on France to help us get through the final stages of cantonment, disarmament and reunification of the nation. I should now like to speak to the African countries, specifically the member countries of ECOWAS. I should like to thank them for, as soon as the crisis began, ECOWAS mobilized itself by our side, both when President Abdulaye Wade was head of our common organization and when he was succeeded by President Kufuor.

Our neighbours, our brothers of the subregion have spared no effort in order to restore peace in our country.

This evening I have asked them to stay with us as we make our final efforts for peace in Côte d'Ivoire and for balance in the whole of West Africa. I am hoping, above all from the countries of ECOWAS, that we will all reaffirm the principle that no State of ours will serve as a base for destabilizing another State. I am convinced that if this principle were to be observed, half of the conflicts in Black Africa would end.

In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire is following with interest developments in Liberia, that sister country which has been ravaged by 14 years of civil war. We are happy to see the international community firmly committed to resolving the Liberian conflict,

particularly since the return to stability in Liberia opens great prospects for subregional cooperation. When the Liberian President visited us, three days ago, I said that Côte d'Ivoire was prepared to work not only for the return of peace in his country but also to commit Ivorian companies to the reconstruction of economic infrastructures.

My dear compatriots,

I should like to remind you that in all the negotiations that I have been conducting, both inside the country and outside, I have been motivated by one thing: the desire to secure peace without compromising the future of Côte d'Ivoire. But just as we need peace for ourselves, within our borders, so we must realize that peace in Côte d'Ivoire will help to safeguard prosperity throughout the subregion on which our country's prosperity depends.

Today more than ever before, we must be united. The war is not yet over. We have one last step to take. The world will judge our capacity to remain one nation, united, strong and prosperous, by our determination to press on, resolutely. I am counting on you. I have confidence in you. Let us move ahead to peace without anguish, without impatience. This evening, I am convinced, my dear compatriots, that we have understood one another. Peace is at hand.

May God bless Côte d'Ivoire.

Abidjan, 27 November 2003